"I am not going on": Negotiating Christmas Publishing Rhythms with Dickens's *Mugby Junction*

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In 1866, Charles Dickens added *Mugby Junction*, the eighth and penultimate extra Christmas number of his weekly periodical *All the Year Round*, to an inundated seasonal publishing market. As he prepared for its publication, he wrote to Wilkie Collins that he was "in Christmas Labour" and declared to George Russell that he was "a prisoner to the Xmas No."[1] Nearly two years later, in July 1868, he was "in a positive state of despair about the Xmas No."[2] I want to suggest that *Mugby Junction* reveals just what provoked this pain, pressure, and eventual despair.

Annual Christmas publications demanded Dickens's attention for many years. Following *A Christmas Carol*, he produced four more Christmas books during the 1840s, and from 1850 he conducted Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. From 1852 they consisted almost entirely of collections of short stories written by both himself and others.[3] He connected these tales through all manner of convoluted premises, from left luggage filled with stories to tales related by a long-term lodger in a widow's house.[4] Readers expected these annual collections, but the 1866 extra number would comprise Dickens's final framed tales.[5] In 1867, his last Christmas publication, *No Thoroughfare*, took the form of a play instead.

Dickens's final collection of Christmas stories, *Mugby Junction* explores the sense of expectation and repetition attendant on assembling a seasonal supplement. Dickens's framing narrative and two stories he contributed to the collection display his frustration with the Christmas publishing calendar.[6] He predicates *Mugby Junction*'s two-part framing narrative upon the interruption of time's regulated progress: a railway passenger terminates what should have been a continuing journey at Mugby and announces "I am not going on."[7] Titled "Barbox Brothers" and "Barbox Brothers and Co.," this frame concerns the passenger, a "gentleman for Nowhere," who travels up and down the junction's different lines, collecting the stories which comprise the extra Christmas number as he goes. These travels always make a return to the junction, but at the same time he makes progress from being the gentleman for Nowhere to being the gentleman for

Somewhere, finally settling at Mugby. The first of Dickens's other two stories published in the collection, "The Boy at Mugby," is narrated by a refreshment room worker at the junction, who, along with his coworkers, expresses a recalcitrant attitude towards their timetabled work. Dickens's final story, "The Signal-Man," tells of its narrator's repeated visits to a tormented man.[8] It is for all intents and purposes a ghost story, if a very different one from many of Dickens's previous haunted tales. The gentleman for Nowhere's activities suggest Dickens's editorial work of collecting and organising annual Christmas numbers. He makes his progress amongst the cacophonous and conflicted multiple rhythms that affect and determine more general experiences of modernity. And as the narrator collects and selects his stories, engaging in what we might call his editorial work, *Mugby Junction* reverberates with this persistent uproar.

Scholars have noted how *Mugby Junction*, especially "The Signalman," could be considered a response to technological progress.[9] Recently James Mussell has argued that it evokes the tension between endings and seriality in periodical publication, between becoming "too stuck, like Barbox Brothers" and becoming, "like Barbox Brothers at the conclusion of his story, […] something else."[10] It should not surprise readers of *Mugby Junction* that Dickens soon decided to terminate his annual production of framed Christmas tales. For Dickens, as for other writers and editors, the Christmas market interrupted more regular timetables of publication, but this interruption was expected and was rhythmically repeated. Moreover, Christmas necessitated a conscious production of what Roland Barthes has termed a "readerly" text, that is, texts which are "products (and not productions)" and that "must have a particular system of meaning" where the "reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness."[11] Although *Mugby Junction* operates as one such product in a number of ways, Dickens uses his contributions to the collection as a means of confronting the problems of Christmas publishing. He confronts the repetitiveness of the task by suggesting that the creation of an extra Christmas number is cyclical, rather than progressive, a form of publication that is "not going on." Aware of both the success and excess of the Christmas market, Dickens expresses an ambivalence towards the effects of human interaction with the rhythms of modernity.

He addresses the predictability and relentlessness of Christmas publishing by shaping his readers into active, rather than idle, participants and by offering a model of taking one's time, of exploring what it means to be "not going on."

Mugby Junction's Place in the Periodical Market

We can think of Christmas publishing as contributing to the "cacophony" of periodical print, which Laurel Brake describes as having "regular, insistent" rhythms and which Mark Turner calls "competing, overlapping cycles of time that confront the reader."[12] Christmas annuals such as *Mugby Junction* supplemented the regular cycles of their parent publications. In many ways, they also repeated the periodicals they supplemented. The title *Mugby Junction* appears in the same typeface as *All the Year Round*; likewise, even though it was published in Christmas blue wrappers, its columns, main text font, borders, and repetition of Dickens's name were the same as in its parent publication. However, as a supplement, it intruded upon *All the Year Round*'s regular weekly rhythm. Published on a Monday, *Mugby Junction* appeared on a different day of the week than the regular Saturday numbers of *All the Year Round*, arriving between chapters sixteen and seventeen of Edmund Yates's serial *Black Sheep!* and chapters three and four of Frances Eleanor Trollope's *Kätchen's Caprices.* It is useful to think of the extra numbers as being "defined not by their regular position or occurrence within the serial, but by their position outside it," as Brake explains.[13] *All the Year Round* published a mixture of serial fiction, history, and factual reports each week; its seasonal supplements, on the other hand, consisted of fictional stories connected by a framing narrative. Mussell explains that a "repetitive formal framework differentiates those aspects that constitute the broader periodical" from "those that constitute its content."[14] Even though the annual and the weekly issue were visually similar, Dickens's Christmas numbers disrupted this sameness by providing content that was very different from the weekly cycle's usual offerings. Christmas supplements interrupted the lives of their producers as much as they did the usual reading practices of consumers.

To publish a Christmas supplement was to enter into a highly competitive market. The Christmas number could not be put off, so Dickens was obligated to participate in a calendrical rhythm over which he had no control. The seasonal cycle required a period of preparation, advertisement, and sale which interrupted the usual publication timeframes. This not only prolonged the Christmas period well before its actual time of celebration but also anticipated the ending of the year months before the winter season had commenced. *The Publishers' Circular*, for example, advertised Christmas publications starting on October 1, 1866, with editorials announcing that the "shortening days are not more certain indications of the approach of winter than that rush of publishers' announcements."[15] They also note the "tendency on the part of publishers to reserve their strength for Christmas."[16] In this way, Christmas publishing distorted the usual publishing calendar by placing emphasis on a single publishing season and thus disproportionately dominating an editor's autumn schedule of work.

The regular repetition of the Christmas publishing market created an expectation of repetition.[17] The fact that Dickens had published Christmas numbers in the eight years prior to *Mugby Junction* would surely have led its audience to expect a particular form, structure, and style to which he would conform. In 1865, for example, the *Times* stated that the "Christmas number of *All the Year Round* is, *it is well known*, a batch of stories connected together by an editorial narrative which professes to account for the collection of so many separate tales."[18] The pressure of fulfilling readers' expectations and competing for their attention within an overabundant Christmas market was intense.[19] This market not only featured collections of short stories such as *Mugby Junction* but also a host of other competing publications. In 1866, the *Publisher's Circular* also offered consumers several other seasonal story collections besides Dickens's extra number: *Cassell's Christmas Annual: My Pale Companion*; *A String of Strange Stories Told Round a Christmas Fire by Six Young Widows and a Spinster Lady of a Certain Age*; *The Five Alls*; *The Blue Door*; and *Chamber's Christmas Number: Up Mont Blanc.*[20] The editors conclude by remarking that "there are yet others which our space will not permit us to mention, which are all in their way

meritorious." [21] Even with this degree of competition, a successful Christmas number could be very lucrative for its parent periodical. *All the Year Round*'s Christmas numbers differed from the regular weekly issues in that their wrappers displayed income-generating advertisements. Moreover, by offering content equivalent to "two ordinary numbers," the Christmas number could be priced at a higher level than the weekly issues: 4d. instead of 2d. For an editor like Dickens, this pecuniary advantage must have been difficult to resist.

Sustaining an annual schedule of Christmas publication required the repeated invention of new scenarios with which to connect the constituent stories without seeming formulaic. As the editor of *Beeton's Christmas Annual* put it, "Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no deception. We are candour itself. We have some Christmas stories to tell. [. . .] A thousand and any amount of devices might easily have occurred—but we refuse to accept them. No: here are our stories. We did not discover them in a garret or a cellar; they were not left by a mysterious stranger in a carpet-bag with spectacles; they were not related to us by a fellow-lodger who turned out to be our long-lost brother. [There is] [. . .] nothing of this kind about them."[22] The carpet bag and fellow-lodger references of course allude to Dickens's previous Christmas numbers, which occupied the same market as *Beeton's* seasonal publications. Serial publications thus had to fulfill reader expectations yet regularly innovate. As Margaret Beetham describes, "Every number is different, but it is still 'the same' periodical."[23] By declaring that its annual collection is novel, *Beeton's* acknowledges what Beetham calls the "importance given to the 'now' or the 'new' in the time-regulated socio-economic culture of nineteenth-century Britain."[24] Yet novelty might go too far. Later *Beeton's* says of other writers, "Their writings on the wall might be so ingeniously contrived as to render it impossible even for the most expert to conjecture whether the forthcoming novelty were a play, a pill or a picture—whether it were a new mode, a new magazine—or, a Christmas Annual."[25] *Beeton's* ultimately introduces a simplistic and well-practiced framing narrative in which house guests sit around a fire and draw straws to tell the stories which follow. It thus acknowledges the demand for novelty and yet provides conforming repetition. In *Mugby Junction*, however, Dickens

both acknowledges and disrupts reader expectations while at the same time providing metacommentary on the punishing rhythms of the Christmas publishing market.

Interrupted Rhythms at Mugby Junction

From the outset, *Mugby Junction* disrupts the usual narrative patterns associated with extra Christmas numbers. The concluding part of the framing narrative follows immediately after the first part rather than being placed as the final instalment of the whole text. In this way, the structure of the collection places the stories out of chronological sequence, disrupting the conventions associated with previous Christmas numbers, which located the stories within the bookends of a narrative frame. This structure immediately signals Dickens's interest in challenging the conventions of time and expectation.

Just as *Mugby Junction* appears in the midst of competing publication cycles, so the gentleman "for Nowhere" steps off a train and into a multiplicity of timeframes. "Barbox Brothers" refers to all manner of temporal markers, emphasising how competing rhythms overwhelm. Dickens personifies clock time in the "tearful face of his watch," which at first seems to ground the narrative. The gentleman stops at Mugby at "past three o'clock of a tempestuous morning."[26] Clock time is equated with railway time: we encounter the precise schedule of the timetable, as the train stops "three minutes here" and station staff await the "three forty-two."[27] The signals also clock railway time: "Lamp waved. Signal lights ahead already changing," thus indicating the train's progress.[28] Other temporal markers offer less precise measurements: the gentleman's appearance indicates that he is "within five years of fifty either way" and "had turned grey too soon."[29] Dickens writes that the gentleman "never [had] a childhood," and describes years of his life as either "best" or "monotonous" during an amorphous period of time. When another character, Lamps, talks about having written songs, he never fixes this activity at a particular stage of his life; rather, it just "went against the grain at that time."[30] Dickens evokes a metaphorical sense of time with his reference to the "train of a life," which is echoed in Lamps's description of time as "dead," "deadest," and "deadest and buriedest."[31] Dickens also depicts the residue of the slow passage of time registered in

the “impressions of velveteen trousers” and “many rounded smears and smudges of stooping velveteen shoulders” found on Lamps’s cabin’s furniture indicating the sort of temporal movement that is only noticed once it has passed.[32] In less than three pages, then, Dickens situates readers in a tangle of temporalities: natural and industrial, controlling and vague, figurative, accumulative, and always passing.

Dickens reinforces the cacophony of temporal rhythms when the gentleman for Nowhere contemplates the junction at Mugby: “There was no beginning, middle or end to the bewilderment. [. . .] Then was heard a distant ringing of bells and blowing of whistles. Then, puppet-looking heads of men popped out of boxes and popped in again. Then, prodigious wooden razors, set upon end, began shaving the atmosphere. Then, several locomotive engines in several directions began to scream and be agitated. Then, along one avenue a train came in. Then, along another two trains appeared that didn’t come in but stopped without.”[33] Here Dickens portrays rhythms so consuming that human actors have all but disappeared into an automated world—the workings of a cyclical system without end. The “bewilderment” of the junction is infinite and perpetual. Dickens creates the sense of propulsion with the constant movement described through the repetition of “then.” The men behave like jack in the boxes, and the surreal image of signals shaving reinforces the sense of repetition. The trains appear to be responsible for their own functioning and consequently rail workers have become mechanical parts, thus reinforcing the image of a system out of human control.

When the gentleman steps off the train, he encounters temporalities that do not simply represent a linear progression from A to B. Each has a rhythm—diurnal, biological, or industrial. The biological cycle of life and death physically marks household objects: the impression of trousers and smudges on the walls suggests the regularity of Lamps’s working life. This is time as an accumulation rather than a precise measurement. Lamps’s past is vague rather than calendar specific, and the gentleman’s progression through life is equally difficult to pin down. Thus, from the outset, the characters cannot be defined precisely in a temporal sense even as precise

measurement of time surrounds them. Just like the regular temporality of the Christmas publishing season, time passes in the story, repeats, and makes itself visible. However, Dickens suggests that the seemingly relentless structures of time such as train schedules or publishing calendars can, to some extent, be disrupted and resisted.

Just as Dickens bows to the pressures and distractions of the Christmas publishing timetable, he explores problems of time and attention in "The Signalman." The un-named narrator wanders the railway lines at his leisure like the gentleman for Nowhere but provides a far less reliable narrative point of view. He happens upon a signalman working in a railway cutting who is mentally disturbed. During repeated visits, the narrator learns that the signalman believes himself to be haunted by a ghost although Dickens never reveals the ghost directly to the reader. As Daniel Tyler demonstrates, Dickens's ghost stories in his Christmas books can be read as "subtle investigations into the process of reading fiction" as they contain and "intricate interplay of belief and incredulity."[34] However, in "The Signal-Man" Dickens highlights the difficulty of achieving a readerly, interpretative attention while contending with frequent interruptions. This loss of attentiveness is in part a product of industrialization and modernity. Ewald Mengel has argued that "Dickens's fears and apprehensions as to the dehumanising effects of technological progress on man and the dangers of the Industrial Revolution take the form of images that have the quality and suggestiveness of a nightmare."[35] Yet Dickens seems just as intent on emphasising the narrator's inability to see the signalman clearly. The narrator states that he was "so steeped in the glow of an angry red sunset that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all."[36] At this point in the narrative, the signalman "[stands] at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole," yet the narrator completely fails to read this as an indication of an approaching train which causes him to "start back."[37] Dickens presents natural rhythms, symbolised by the setting sun, in collision with industrial ones, figured as the signalman and the signs he must make. In commencing with the concealment of the industrial by the natural, he grounds this narrative in the idea that industrial temporalities do not, in fact, always predominate. Instead "The Signal-Man"

takes place in a world in which these different temporal rhythms entwine: the wind makes a "wild harp" of the telegraph wires and later "the wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail."[38] Industrial (telegraphic) and natural (meteorological) temporalities do not conflict; for Dickens, the difficulty occurs when one attempts to attend too closely to a single rhythm. The signalman "[is] at all times liable to be called by his electric bell," which reflects his having responsibility for ensuring the safety of others, a responsibility dependent upon the maintenance of a constant attendance to and control of railway time.[39] The appearance of a frightening spectre arises, it seems, out of this focus as the signalman worries about potential accidents on the line. This singular attentiveness ultimately leads to his death; there is a danger in being distracted by a particular temporal rhythm.

Models of Negotiation

Focusing one's attention is just one challenge individuals face when negotiating multiple, enmeshed industrial and natural rhythms, timeframes that cannot simply be untangled and marked as good or bad. Dickens uses his contributions to *Mugby Junction* to propose models of negotiation that could be applied to navigating the competing publishing rhythms of the Christmas season. He suggests that the inability to control rhythms does not necessarily produce mindless conformity. In "The Boy at Mugby," Dickens shows how individuals might accommodate these competing temporalities. "You should see our Bandolining Room at Mugby Junction," the Boy says, "where Our Missus and our young ladies Bandolines their hair. You should see 'em at it, betwixt trains, Bandolining away. [. . .] When you're telegraphed, you should see their noses all a-going up with scorn, as if it was a part of the working of the same Cooke and Wheatstone electrical machinery. You should hear Our Missus give the word, 'Here comes the Beast to be fed!'"[40] The railway's rhythms do not engross the refreshment room staff in the same way that signalling consumes the signalman; the ladies quite happily attend to their appearance rather than keeping watch for the next train. Dickens presents the customers as not individuals but as a bestial mass coalesced by the rhythms of the railway's operation. Their mindless absorption into regulatory rhythm is also reflected in actions of the

refreshment room workers, who raise their disdainful noses in a synchronised response to the telegraph "as if it was part of the working." The fact that the workers primp "betwixt" the non-specific arrivals of "trains" (rather than at a particular time) also suggests their conformity to railway rhythms. They might attend to themselves as much as they monitor the trains but they do so in accordance with a timetable that they do not control and are thus assimilated into its rhythm. Although the refreshment room staff may seem automatic rather than intentional in their actions, Dickens presents their participation as reluctant and careless. The narrator observes, "You should see 'em *indignantly* skipping across the Line [. . .] and begin to *pitch* the stale pastry into the plates, and *chuck* the sawdust sangwiches under the glass covers."[41] Their belligerent attitude towards the performance of their duties suggests their impatience with the rhythms of work. A hostile performance of conformity seems preferable to being a hideous horde. As Dickens himself complies with the rhythm of Christmas publishing, he, too, reserves the right to be actively resentful.

Just as he defies some conventions of Christmas publishing whilst nonetheless producing a Christmas publication, Dickens also uses his stories to imagine the act of rebelliously "taking one's time." The narrator of "The Signal-Man" fails to comprehend the rhythms he sees at work around him, but his behaviour can also be seen as resistance, an active disregard for industrial timeframes. The narrator notes that the signalman "was several times interrupted by the little bell," which made him "[break] off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done."[42] Clearly the signalman has work to do and, in stating that he "had" to do it, the narrator displays an awareness of this sense of duty. Yet the narrator fails to acknowledge that he interrupts the signalman's work; instead, he portrays the work as interrupting their discussion, which is a deliberate misreading of the situation. Whilst he does attempt to harmonise his visits with the signalman's work rhythm, it is his early arrival that leads him to discover the signalman's death, leading to confusion and frustration. Dickens presents us with a character who is so determinedly out of sync that he misreads the rhythms in which he finds himself and can thus only provide an

ambiguous conclusion to the story. The narrator concludes, "I may, in closing point out the coincidence that the warning of the engine-driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate signalman had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached—and that only in my mind—to the gesticulation he had intimated."[43]This conclusion does not provide a coherent explanation for the signalman's death since the broken syntax stutters forth uncertain thoughts rather than exact events. Such a conclusion leaves the narrator, and thus the reader, unsure not only of whether the signalman's demise was supernatural but if there really was any ghost at all. In this way, Dickens suggests that choosing to avoid the temporal rhythms of modernity can produce uncertainty and can leave an individual at the mercy of frightening coincidences. In this way "The Signal-man" differs distinctly from Dickens's other Christmas ghost stories, which typically conclude with a hopeful moral message. Yet as much as this ghost story violates the conventions of a seasonal supernatural tale that Dickens himself had established, it does not represent a refusal to participate in the Christmas publishing marketplace altogether. Instead, Dickens challenges his readers to engage in interpretative work; they cannot entirely assume the role of Barthes's "idle" consumer of already-available meaning; rather, they must participate in producing meaning for themselves.

In other instances, Dickens presents "taking one's time" as a collaborative effort. The Boy at Mugby, along with his coworkers, experiences joy by ignoring customers and providing poor service, what he calls a "most highly delicious lark."[44] He and his colleagues relish time spent disrupting customers' expectations: refreshments do not refresh and employees fail to provide any semblance of service. Yet even as they engage in individualized acts of hostility, the workers are portrayed as connected group. The young ladies' names rhyme, "Mrs Sniff," "Miss Piff," and "Miss Whiff," and they respond to "Our Missis's" stories of good service in France with "universal laughter" and a "spirited chorus."[45] The Boy and his colleagues treat the one dutiful employee as an outsider. This man, the "disgustingly servile" Sniff, acts through the "force of habit," and, like the signalman, his dedication to duty portends a terrible end. "You won't get a chance to see Sniff,

because he disappeared that night. Whether he perished, tore to pieces, I cannot say," concludes the Boy.[46] Dickens presents Sniff's refusal to cooperate with his colleagues' malicious behavior as the reason for his demise. The Boy and his coworkers enjoy disrupting others' expectations of time and duty. When he describes how individuals can enjoyably resist conformity to workplace rhythms, Dickens cannot imagine it as something undertaken alone. The story seems to indicate that successfully "taking one's time" can be collaborative.

Whilst Dickens's model of "taking one's time" in "The Boy at Mugby" suggests his desire for collaboration, or collusion at least, elsewhere he seems to argue for taking personal control of time. In the framing narrative, the gentleman for Nowhere reveals, "I am travelling from my birthday [. . .] to try and crush the day."[47] In other words, he wants to eliminate those natural rhythms with which he is forced to measure himself, a birthday being a resounding reminder of our cyclical progress through life. Indeed, he states that he intends to "pass the rest of my days" in motion "on this travel of mine."[48] To want to "pass" rather than spend or occupy one's days suggests an intentional lack of engagement. Thus, it seems that he will act in the same way as the narrator of "The Signal-Man" by failing to recognize the temporal patterns which would define him. Yet in following his own desires according to his own timeframe, the gentleman can't help interpreting his life in temporal terms. He renders his travels countable by tying them to the seven branching roads emanating from Mugby, which he will travel "until he attaches something that he has seen, heard or found out at the head of each of the seven roads to the road itself."[49] Moreover, this first half of the framing narrative concludes with the gentleman giving Lamps's daughter Phoebe something like an accordion, an instrument entirely attached to rhythm, from which she can "pick out delightful music."[50] But he imposes these rhythms. By the end of "Barbox Brothers and Co," the gentleman "established himself at Mugby Junction," progressing from disruption to connection, from being for Nowhere to being for Somewhere—"Old Barbox who lived on a hill."[51] Significantly, he resides at the confluence of Mugby Junction, right in the midst of modernity's multiple temporalities.[52] The narrator repeats that "it was the convenient place to live in" four times

in the framing narrative's concluding paragraph.[53] This repetition creates a sense of rhythm and thus suggests that Old Barbox, in "taking his time," also lives according to a rhythm of his own.

To reach this resting place, the gentleman undertakes two other repetitions, acts of return that establish connections with places and people. First, in spite of his desire to travel from his birthday, he "can't make up [his] mind yet which iron road to take" and so "improved his acquaintance with the Junction that night, and again next morning, and again next night and morning"; he also returns every day to the house occupied by Lamps and his daughter.[54] This return develops his connection with Phoebe, a relationship of crucial importance since she becomes the person to whom he brings his stories. The recurring trips produce change. Through a coincidence that can only occur because of his "taking his time," the gentleman finds himself reconnecting with a past lover, now married, but with whom he can resolve the past and commence a different kind of relationship, which happily includes her family. Thus, his repeated actions, personally instigated, lead to a happy outcome. His ultimate success depends upon connection, "for he was Barbox Brothers and Co. now, and had taken a thousand partners into the solitary firm."[55] On his birthday, the gentleman remarks, "I'll go back, instead of going on. I'll go back by my friend Lamps's Up X presently."[56] He is no longer simply "not going on." He says to himself, "I wish you many happy returns."[57] Dickens imagines "taking one's time" not only as intentional rebellion but also as a comfortable adjustment to rhythms over which one has no control. The gentleman returns to this calendrical rhythm and finds that he can now, being connected, enjoy its beat. But birthdays mark the process of ageing and thus the end of the framing narrative suggests temporal progression, rather than stasis.

Dickens portrays interpersonal relationships in *Mugby Junction* through the action of hands. In the framing narrative, Phoebe appears as a face and a "pair of delicate hands," the children she teaches kiss their hands to her, and Dickens describes her as "giving her hand to her father" who "[pats] it between his own."[58] Likewise, in the second half of the framing narrative, when the gentleman meets his ex-lover's daughter, we repeatedly see them "hand in hand."[59] These symbols

of connection contrast with those of disconnection in "The Signal-Man." The narrator says, "goodnight then, and here's my hand," to which the signalman responds, "Goodnight, sir, and here's mine."[60] Of course, this depicts the process of shaking hands, but Dickens does not present the action of joining hands; instead, he emphasizes their separateness. The narrator continues, "With that, we walked side by side to his box."[61] They are together, yes, but they never actually connect, and later when the signalman does touch the narrator "on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice," he responds with resistance: "Involuntarily, I pushed my chair back."[62] This failure to connect reinforces the signalman's and his narrator's different experiences of temporality. The narrator has been "taking his own time": he has nothing else to do than visit the signalman, and out of this idleness he creates the narrative. Yet, unlike in the framing narrative, the narrator's missed connections leave readers doubting his ability to interpret evidence. Writers and readers establish conventions by making, interpreting, and repeating connections between textual detail and meaning. Through the narrator's disconnection in "The Signal-Man," Dickens suggests that any form of storytelling that resists established conventions nevertheless gives readers a more active role in making meaning.

Conclusion

During the Christmas season, publications flooded the market, and individual publications struggled to differentiate themselves. For writers and editors, the season imposed a whole range of deadlines that interrupted other print rhythms and complicated their professional obligations. Dickens's contributions to *Mugby Junction* highlight how conflicting temporalities can consume the individual. He suggests that the individual might pause or operate according to their own timeframes. As the gentleman says of the stories, "They occupied a much longer time in the getting together than they ever will in the perusal." [63] This hints at Dickens's frustration at the effort and disruption involved in producing a Christmas number. It is little wonder that in 1868, Dickens revealed in a letter to Charles Fechter that he felt plagued by the "CHRISTMAS NUMBER!!!"[64] He continues, lamenting, "I feel as if I had murdered a Christmas number years ago [. . .] and its ghost

perpetually haunted me."[65] He uses *Mugby Junction* to comment on the relentlessness of seasonal publication, defying reader expectations as often as he meets them. He offers a model of effecting individual rhythm through deliberate disorder within externally imposed temporal rhythms, a disorder that demands the interpretive work of readers.

In the November 28, 1868 number of *All the Year Round*, Dickens announced that a new series would commence with the following issue, maintaining the periodical's rhythms. However, he announces, "One intended omission in the New Series. The Extra Christmas Number has now been so extensively, and regularly, and often imitated, that it is in very great danger of becoming tiresome. I have therefore resolved (though I cannot add, willingly) to abolish it, at the highest tide of its success."[66] On the same page, he also announces the republication of all of his previous Christmas numbers "handsomely bound in One Volume."[67] Thus, even though Dickens felt that the Christmas number had been devalued by its regular cycle of repeated publication, he acknowledged the ongoing market for such collections. Given that he was "perpetually haunted" by his own Christmas narratives and the temporal disruptions in his work schedule that they entailed, his termination of the annual series was undoubtedly less reluctant than his 1868 announcement suggests. This was Dickens "taking his time" in the relentless calendar of Christmas publication, a rebellious act that *Mugby Junction* anticipates with its foregrounding of temporal conflict.

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NOTES

[1] Letter from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, October 4, 1866, Dickens, *Letters*, 11:251; Letter from Dickens to George Russell, November 6, 1866, Dickens *Letters*, 11:266.

[2] Letter from Charles Dickens to W. H. Wills, July 26, 1868, Dickens, *Letters*, 12:159.

[3] The exception to the rule was *A Message from the Sea*, which appeared in 1860.

[4] For discussion of these narrative devices, see Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas," 61–72.

[5] *No Thoroughfare* was a collaborative single tale structured as if a drama in four acts and was written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins.

[6] The other stories were contributed by Andrew Halliday, Charles Collins, Hesba Stretton, and Amelia B. Edwards.

[7] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 1.

[8] In "Spectres of Style," Tyler explores Dickens's Christmas book ghosts and their propensity to effect "humanising conversion" (103). This sort of transformation does not occur in "The Signal-Man."

[9] Mengel argues that "The Signalman" highlights "Dickens's fears and apprehensions as to the dehumanising effects of technological progress" ("Structure and Meaning," 271). More recently, Wagner has argued that *Mugby Junction* employs railway technology to create a "narrative centrally concerned with a forging of new connections" ("Dickens's 'gentleman for Nowhere,'" 62).

[10] Mussell, "Moving Things."

[11] Barthes, *S/Z*, 5, 8, 4.

[12] Brake, *Print in Transition*, 11; Turner, "Periodical Time," 188.

[13] Brake, "Lost and Found," 114.

[14] Mussell, "Repetition," 348.

[15] "Literary Intelligence," October 1, 1866, 561.

[16] "Christmas Books of the Season," 738.

[17] Marysa Demoor and Kate Macdonald observe that "frequency of appearance is also a consideration when studying the use of the supplement" ("Finding and Defining the Victorian Supplement," 105). Certainly, as Turner demonstrates, nineteenth-century periodicals had an "unruliness" about them—"a propensity to change forms, price, title and character, [and a] desire to conclude and continue simultaneously" ("Unruliness of Serials," 26). Thus, seriality did not necessarily designate sameness, and therefore we cannot say that readers would always expect the

same format of Christmas numbers. Indeed, each week the title "*All the Year Round*," which evokes cyclical continuity, was followed by a period. This full stop served as a reminder of a potential end to the cycle, just as Dickens's previous journal, *Household Words* (March 1850–May 1859) eventually closed shop.

[18] "Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions," 6; my emphasis.

[19] Within the wider cacophony of the periodical market, Christmas generated its own raucous noise above which each publication struggled to be heard. In *Christmas in Print*, Tara Moore describes this crowded market in her general survey of many of the components of Victorian Christmas publishing. When considering periodicals, she focuses on the disruptive comedy of *Punch*. See, in particular, her "Introduction," 1–7, and chapter 3, 59–79.

[20] "Christmas Books of the Season"; "Literary Intelligence," November 15, 1866.

[21] "Christmas Books of the Season," 749.

[22] *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, 6.

[23] Beetham, "Open and Closed," 98.

[24] Beetham, "Time," 338.

[25] *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, 5–6.

[26] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 1.

[27] Ibid., 1, 2.

[28] Ibid., 1.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 2.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 4.

[34] Tyler, “Spectres of Style,” 99. Tyler’s interest is largely in Dickens’s Christmas Books and only mentions “The Signal_Man” in passing.

[35] Mengel, “Structure and Meaning,” 271, 280.

[36] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 20.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 23.

[39] Ibid., 21.

[40] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 17. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “Bandoline” as a “gummy preparation for fixing the hair.”

[41] Ibid.; my emphasis.

[42] Ibid., 22.

[43] Ibid., 25.

[44] Dickens, *Mugby Junction*, 18.

[45] Ibid., 18–20.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 9.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 10.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 16.

[52] Ibid., 16, 9, 16.

[53] Ibid., 16.

[54] Ibid., 6.

[55] Ibid., 16.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 5, 7.

[59] Ibid., 12.

[60] Ibid., 22

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 23.

[63] Ibid., 10.

[64] Quoted in Tyler, "Spectres of Style," 93.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Dickens, "New Series of All the Year Round," 596.

[67] Advertisement, 596.

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